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ABSTRACT

To investigate the speech of black college students for nonfluencies--linguistic elements breaking the flow of words or ideas--and to ascertain if students' attendance of a largely black or largely white university influenced their use of nonfluencies, 21 black students at a predominantly black university and 25 black students at a predominantly white university were audiotaped while giving short speeches. Chi square analysis of eight types of nonfluencies--(1) interjections, (2) part-word repetitions, (3) word repetitions, (4) phrase repetitions, (5) revisions, (6) incomplete phrases, (7) broken words, and (8) incomplete sounds--revealed no significant difference between the nonfluency index of either group. Both groups had the highest means for interjections and revisions and used about three nonfluencies per 100 words. As results indicate that very few students will use a large number of nonfluencies, speech communication instructors should recommend that students with 10 or more nonfluencies per 100 words receive help from speech therapists or language specialists. (MM)

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Nonfluencies in the Speeches of Black College Students

by

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The following paper is a shortened form of some sections of a dissertation for the Doctor of Philosophy written by A. Evans under the supervision of T. King.

Nonfluencies in the Speeches of Black College Students

Scholars have focused on style in public speaking since the classical period. Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian each devoted a section of their writing to style. Just what is style as it pertains to public speaking. Style may be defined as the selection and arrangement of those linguistic features which are open to choice (DeVito, 1967). Nonfluency as a linguistic stylistic element is one type of unit studied in the speeches of black college students.

Nonfluencies are described as those linguistic elements in the production of speech which break the flow of speech or those elements which disturb the regular rhythm of the speaker's words or ideas. Perkins (1971) named this phenomenon "normal dysfluency" so as to distinguish it from speech disorders of speech-flow, such as stuttering, stammering, and cluttering (p 303). Using the same term as Perkins (1971), Johnson, Darley, and Spriestersbach (1963) listed a system of classification of disfluencies which is applied in the present investigation. The eight disfluency types are interjections, part-word repetitions, word repetitions, phrase repetitions, revisions, incomplete phrases, broken words, and prolonged sounds. Johnson et al. (1963) computed a total disfluency index and a disfluency type index, using 100-word samples. From these indices, written and spoken, Johnson et al. (1963) established norms for the indices using 200 subjects, 50 male and 50 female stutterers, and 50 male and 50 female nonstutters.

Three additional studies utilized nonfluency factors in discerning stylistic features of language samples. Maclay and

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Osgood (1959) studied hesitation phenomena in spontaneous spoken English of 13 professionals at a conference at the University of Illinois. Correlating hesitation types such as repeats, false starts, filled pauses and unfilled pauses with Fries' classes of English words, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, the researchers found that hesitations were consistently different among speakers, in both the absolute frequencies of all types and in the preferences for these types. Preston and Gardner (1967) used a variable called "ah" speech disturbance ratio (ah SDR), among other variables, to study major dimensions of oral and written language related to personality and ability variables. Through factorial analysis, Preston and Gardner found an interrelation between productivity and the "ah" SDR. "Ss who can generate many words on demand tend to write more and to interject fewer "ah"s in their speech than Ss who lacked this ability" (pp. 942-943). Furthermore, they noted one factor which indicated that persons with relatively poor vocabularies tend to pause frequently for somewhat long periods and tend to produce few words in both speaking and writing.

From the studies stated in this review, the investigators concluded that nonfluency could serve as a descriptive measure in speeches of black college students.

The purpose, then, of this investigation is to analyze speeches of black college students for nonfluency factors and to ascertain whether or not speeches of black students at a predominantly black university differ significantly from those of black students at a predominantly white university in selected nonfluencies.

Methodology

The 25 randomly selected speeches in the study were presented by 25 students in the beginning speech classes at Florida A&M University (FAMU), a predominantly black university, and 21 randomly selected speeches were given by 21 students in beginning speech classes at Florida State University (FSU), a predominantly white university.

The subjects in the investigation were mainly young adults (ages 19-25), who were native Floridians. Two of the 26 students at FAMU were between 26 and 30 years old, but none of the 21 students at FSU was older than 25 years old. The FAMU group included three non-Floridians, while seven in the FSU group were non-Floridians.

From audiotaped speeches presented in the classroom, nonfluencies in the speeches were coded as said. Nonfluencies which were non-English words were described in detail in parenthesis. An and, but, and so began some of the sentences, and in that function, they were categorized as interjections. All of the 46 speeches were transcribed from the audiotapes by one of the investigators.

Three language samples of approximately 100 words were taken from each of the audiotaped speeches of the college students, which were approximately 4 to 5 minutes long. The samples were terminated at the end of the sentence closest to the 100th word.

The nonfluencies were classified according to Johnson et al. (1963):

a. Interjections of sounds, syllables, words, or phrases

which included extraneous sounds such as "ah," "er," and "mum," words such as "okay" and "true;" and extraneous phrases such as "you know" and "allright". When a sentence began with an "and," "but," and "so", these conjunctions were counted as interjections.

b. Part-word repetitions which included repetitions of parts of words--syllables and sounds, such as "ba-ba-bling."

c. Word repetitions which included repetitions of whole words such as "you-you-you."

d. Phrase repetitions which included repetitions of two or more words such as "I was-I was going."

e. Revisions which included instancies whereby the content of a phrase was modified such as "he don't - they don't."

f. Incomplete phrases which included incomplete phrases whereby the thought or content was not completed, such as "She was--and after they arrived she came."

g. Broken words which included words that were not completely pronounced, yet they did not fit into any other category, such as "He was mow-ing the lawn."

h. Prolonged sounds which included sounds or parts of words unduly prolonged, such as "sss ome" and "wh wh wh ere".

According to Johnson et al, the total nonfluency index and the nonfluency types were computed. The total nonfluency index is the total number of nonfluencies of all types of nonfluencies per approximately 100-word samples; whereas, the nonfluency type index is the computation of the number of each of the eight types of

nonfluency per approximately 100-word samples.

Results and Discussion

Reliability was established using one of the researchers and four student assistants. After two training sessions one of the researchers and four student assistants listened to six of the 46 speeches on audiotapes. Each coded the speeches for the 8 types of nonfluencies. Coefficients of 1.00, .71, .65, .75, .85, and .69 were computed among the five coders for the six speeches. The mean for the group was .77. The remaining 40 speeches were coded by the same researcher.

Class intervals for the nonfluency index for the speeches of the black college students at the predominantly black and at the predominantly white University are shown in Table 1. The combined mean for the two groups was 3.28, with a mean of 3.40 for the predominantly black university group and a mean of 3.13 for the predominantly white university group. Using chi square, the researchers found no significant difference between the nonfluency index mean of the speeches of the predominantly black university group and the mean of those of the predominantly white university group.

Table 2 reveals means for the nonfluency type indices of the predominantly black and predominantly white university groups. The nonfluency type indices are interjection, part-word repetition, word repetition, phrase repetition, revision, incomplete phrase, broken word, and prolong word dices. The two groups had highest means for interjection and revision. Chi square was the statistic used to test the significant differences between the means of the two groups of speeches. None of the differences between the nonfluency type

Table 1

Class Intervals of the Nonfluency Index As a Function of the Predominant Race of the University

Nonfluency Index	Predominant Race of the University		
	Black	White	Total
0- .9	3	3	6
1- 1.9	3	4	7
2- 2.9	7	4	11
3- 3.9	3	4	7
4- 4.9	5	1	6
5- 5.9	2	3	5
6- 6.9	1	1	2
7- 7.9	0	0	0
8- 8.9	0	0	0
9- 9.9	0	0	0
10-10.9	0	0	0
11-11.9	1	1	2
Total	25	21	46
Mean	3.40	3.13	3.28

Table 2

Group Means for the Nonfluency Type Indices As a Function of the Predominant Race of the University

Nonfluency Type Indices	Predominant Race of the University	Mean
Interjections	Black	2.39
	White	1.62
Part Word Repetitions	Black	.20
	White	.19
Word Repetitions	Black	.20
	White	.33
Phrase Repetitions	Black	.19
	White	.25
Revisions	Black	.37
	White	.57
Incomplete Phrases	Black	.04
	White	.14
Broken Words	Black	.01
	White	.02
Prolonged Sounds	Black	00
	White	00

indices of the two groups of speeches was significantly different at .05 level of confidence.

As a group the college students spoke about 3 nonfluencies per 100 words (2.28 mean). The most common type was the interjection. Most of the speeches had very few nonfluencies, but the high frequencies found in a few speeches raised the mean of the college students. Johnson (1961) noted that interjections accounted for the largest number of nonfluencies among both males and females speaking about three minutes. Maclay and Osgood (1959) observed that hesitations were really consistent among speakers. Preston and Gardner (1967) found a relationship among oral productivity, vocabulary, and the nonfluency element they called the "ah" speech disturbance. They concluded that students with more speech disturbances apparently had fewer words available in their vocabulary. O'Donnell et al. (1967) observed that nonfluencies were more frequent in first grade and moderately decreased in each succeeding year. Similar to the results of the present study, O'Donnell et al. (1967) noticed that only a few students accounted for the nonfluencies in their language samples.

A comparison of the results in this study with those of the previously discussed research suggests that 1) the number and type of nonfluency was no greater for the black college students than that for any other population, and 2) only a few persons within a normal group will produce most of the nonfluencies. With reference to nonfluency types, the interjections and revisions accounted for the majority of the nonfluencies in the speeches of the students. The nonstutterers in Johnson's research (1961) produced more inter-

jections and revisions than any other type. Since both groups of subjects in Johnson's research presented unprepared 3-minute talks and subjects in the present investigation presented the speeches extemporaneously, some nonfluency was expected in the speech of the subjects in both investigations.

Several implications for teaching are noted. The teacher of speech communication should understand that a large number (10 or more nonfluencies per 100 words) should not be considered normal in speech presentation especially if these are types other than interjections. When nonfluencies occur with greater frequency, the speech teacher should recommend a speech therapist. At the same time, though, some nonfluencies are to be expected if formal speaking performances are delivered extemporaneously or impromptu.

The two groups of college students were not significantly different in mean nonfluency indices. When the various nonfluency types were tested individually for significant differencies, the two groups of college students were not significantly different from each other. Both groups of college students scored higher on the number of interjections and revisions than on any other nonfluency type. Apparently the two groups are more similar than different in nonfluencies.

For teaching implications, instructors of black college students should be aware that in a class of students, very few of the students will use a large number of nonfluencies. Since Preston and Gardner (1967) found a relationship between the frequency of nonfluencies and vocabulary usage, these teachers may recommend

that the students with large numbers of nonfluencies consult a specialist for vocabulary development.

Nonfluency types appear to be similar in the speeches of black students as in the speeches of persons of other ethnic backgrounds.

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